

# **Animal Health Safeguarding Review Implementation Progress Report September 2003**

*Note: The last progress report for the Animal Health Safeguarding Review was issued in December 2002. The report below covers activities from January to September 2003. Monthly reporting is being reinstated with this September progress report.*

## **I. Progress achieved in implementing the review:**

### Surveillance

- Surveillance infrastructure - VS is taking steps to create a multidisciplinary National Surveillance Unit (NSU). The NSU will serve as the focal point of the National Surveillance System (NSS) and be responsible for the collection, processing, and delivery of surveillance information and will be located at CEAH. The NSU will also develop the information infrastructure for the NSS, design and lead implementation of surveillance systems and strategies, coordinate and integrate surveillance activities, and establish linkages, partnerships, and liaisons. VS had previously created a Field Implementation Team to evaluate and “ground truth” new surveillance initiatives. These infrastructure developments will move VS toward implementing Safeguarding Review recommendation #16 of providing a framework for the NSS which includes standardization, identification, information management, and technical resources.
- National animal identification system progress – A National Animal Identification Development Team was formed in early 2003. The Development Team has approximately 100 members representing 70 industry organizations. The entire Development Team met in July and produced a new draft *US Animal Identification Plan* which more thoroughly discusses time frames, reflects an accelerated phase-in process, and has significantly more detail than the document presented at the USAHA meeting in October 2002. The Development Team met again in September to further develop the plan. The draft plan was posted on a public website in late September. It will be presented at USAHA to the Animal Identification Committee. Safeguarding Review recommendation #128 calls for the development of a comprehensive animal identification system that takes into consideration state and regional animal production methods.
- Wildlife disease surveillance along the Mexican border – On September 18<sup>th</sup>, APHIS Wildlife Services reached an agreement with the Mexican Ministry of Public Health to establish a pilot project to monitor wildlife rabies along the Texas/Mexican border. APHIS Wildlife Services sees this pilot project as a first step in a long-term goal of conducting surveillance activities for various wildlife diseases along the border. Representatives from the Center for Disease Control

and APHIS IS were also present at the meeting. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 113 and 135 address the role that wildlife play in disseminating diseases.

- Strengthening State-level swine surveillance – Area Epidemiology Officers from eight key swine production states attended a training session September 23 and 24<sup>th</sup> in Fort Collins to learn how to create Swine Health Advisory Committees out of existing Pseudorabies Virus Advisory Committees. This new approach will assist States in building up their epidemiological capacity for detecting and responding to emerging swine issues. Training included an overview of pork industry health and management. The meeting was hosted by VS and the National Pork Board. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations (#s 2, 7, 12) address obtaining guidance on surveillance needs from stakeholders and utilizing innovative approaches to identify emerging issues.
- Market swine surveillance meeting – Representatives from the National Pork Producers, Iowa Pork Producers, Iowa State University, APHIS, and USAHA met in January to discuss results from the Market Swine Surveillance Pilot. The pilot was initiated in 2001 to determine the feasibility of developing a slaughter surveillance system of market swine for detection of pseudorabies. Results to date suggest that market swine surveillance could be considered as a component of a comprehensive surveillance system for the swine industry. Safeguarding Review recommendation #3 encourages the use of technological advancements to meet evolving NSS needs.

## Response

- Emergency operations center opened – In April, APHIS opened its new Emergency Operations Center (AEOC). This state-of-the-art facility will significantly improve APHIS' capability to coordinate responses to animal and plant health emergencies. Safeguarding Review recommendation #115 calls for integration of the APHIS national response plan into one similar to FEMA. The new AEOC will serve as the national emergency operations center in an animal disease event.
- Emergency coordinators hired – As of September 25<sup>th</sup>, VS has hired seven veterinarians to serve as Area Emergency Management Coordinators. These veterinarians will work with FEMA and other emergency response organizations and state regulatory agencies in their assigned states to coordinate emergency response planning and preparedness. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 105, 111, and 123 call for continuing cooperative efforts to improve emergency response, defining state/federal authorities, and reviewing the READEO system. The hiring of these coordinators also addresses concerns raised in the Review about infrastructure deficiencies.

- Response to END, BSE, SVC, and monkeypox – APHIS, State, and industry personnel have recently gained experience by responding to Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) in California, Nevada, Arizona and Texas; BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis) in Canada; Spring Viremia of Carp (SVC); and monkeypox. More than 250,000 work days were logged by participants in the END task force. The END response provided valuable on-the-job experience in the Incident Command System. The SVC and monkeypox outbreaks also allowed APHIS to continue to develop and expand working relationships with other agencies. Safeguarding Review recommendation #105 calls for continued cooperative efforts to respond to emerging diseases. Safeguarding Review recommendation #114 calls for creating pools of emergency responders from the ranks of retired personnel and private practitioners. In addition, participation of APHIS WS personnel in the END response addresses Safeguarding Review recommendation #133 which calls for clarifying the roles of WS in an emergency response.
- Memorandums of Understanding with Tribal Nations – In May, APHIS signed Memorandums of Understanding with all of the Montana Tribes. The nine tribes signing the MOUs comprise the Montana Wyoming Indian Stockgrowers Association. Responsibilities of the tribes under these MOUs include the development of emergency action plans. Safeguarding Review recommendation #117 calls for funding and supporting the development of cooperative agreements with individual states for specific response plans.
- New round of Tripartite Exercises established – APHIS VS, Emergency Programs, in conjunction with the North American Animal Health Committee and the tripartite countries of Canada, Mexico, and the US, developed a Tripartite Exercise Program that will take place in 2003, 2004, and 2005. The intent of this exercise program is to provide realistic training on emergency response plans, to practice their execution, and to evaluate the results. The first phase of this program took place in May with the AMISTAD Exercise. This exercise focused on issues related to a cross border outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Co-hosts of the exercise were the Texas Animal Health Commission, Mexico's SAGARPA, and USDA APHIS. Emergency response was evaluated at many different levels and this exercise provided an opportunity for the North American FMD vaccine bank technical committee to test its implementation plan for dealing with a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak involving more than one strain of virus in multiple locations in Texas and Mexico. Canadian and Mexican members of the vaccine bank technical committee also participated in the exercise. Safeguarding Review recommendation #110 calls for implementing a process to review and revise response plans. Recommendation #112 calls for the development of a vaccination strategy for foreign animal diseases.
- Vaccination used in response – Vaccination has been used to control the low pathogenic avian influenza outbreak which began in Connecticut in March. The vaccine protocol was developed after extensive collaborations between VS, the

State of Connecticut, and industry representatives. Information was provided to international trading partners to minimize trade disruptions from this outbreak. Safeguarding Review recommendation #112 called for the development of a vaccination strategy for foreign animal diseases.

- Compensation expertise added to VS – VS has established an Emergency Management Compensation Specialist position. The Compensation Specialist will be responsible for advising management on compensation issues, developing compensation approaches for individual animal health events, maintaining up-to-date databases with information needed for setting compensation values, staying abreast of livestock valuation techniques, and exploring new methods for approaching compensation such as insurance programs. Safeguarding Review recommendation #148 calls for the development of comprehensive indemnity plans.
- Cost sharing rule – In July, APHIS issued a proposed rule which would establish criteria to determine the Federal share of financial responsibility relative to States and other cooperators in an emergency in which an animal or plant pest or disease threatens the agricultural production of the United States. The intent of the proposal is to facilitate long-term resource planning and funding decisions by both the Federal government and cooperators. Safeguarding Review recommendation #148 calls for the development of comprehensive indemnity plans.
- Background paper on livestock insurance – In June, VS submitted a report to the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) outlining research VS conducted for RMA. This information will assist RMA in evaluating insurance products being proposed which will cover losses due to livestock disease. The report describes the U.S. livestock industry, the current state of international agricultural insurance, and producer views on insurance alternatives. Safeguarding Review recommendation #148 calls for the development of comprehensive indemnity plans.
- Resource ordering and status system implementation – APHIS is working with the Forest Service to implement their Resource Ordering and Status System (ROSS) to help APHIS manage the availability of resources (individuals, teams, and equipment) for responding to any plant or animal health event. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 111 and 114 address taking steps to ensure the response organization is fully prepared and staffed.
- Development of agriculture scenarios for ICS training – APHIS subject matter experts met with the vendor developing web-based Incident Command System 100 and 200 training modules. The meeting focused on developing production agriculture scenarios so that the ICS 100 and 200 training modules would be relevant to people involved in responding to animal and plant health events. Safeguarding Review recommendation #115 calls for merging animal health

emergency response with other federal emergency management efforts. The ICS is utilized by other response organizations.

- Personal protective equipment training for early responders – Training was conducted in Ames the week of September 8<sup>th</sup>. The course trained personnel in evaluating a disease outbreak site, determining appropriate personal protective equipment, and knowing how to use the equipment. Safeguarding Review recommendation #111 calls for ensuring that response personnel are prepared.
- ISA Symposium Proceedings published – In September, the USDA, US Department of Interior, US Geological Survey, and US Department of Commerce published: *International Response to Infectious Salmon Anemia: Prevention, Control, and Eradication*. This publication contains the proceedings of a September 2002 symposium on infectious salmon anemia. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations address the need for collaborations with other agencies in developing response plans and for addressing wildlife-related aspects of animal diseases (#s 105 and 134).

#### Exclusion

- New animal import center in Miami – In April, APHIS opened a new state-of-the-art import and export facility at the Miami airport. The facility is equipped with 60 stalls for imports, 24 stalls for exports, and avian quarantine areas for both commercial and pet birds. While not specifically addressed in the Safeguarding Review recommendations, new facilities in Miami will allow APHIS to better serve importers and exporters and ensure that animals imported into the US fully meet import requirements.
- Collecting and reporting international health information – In September, APHIS International Services began hiring new staff to fill overseas positions dedicated to monitoring international health data. VS is working with IS and PPQ on an Offshore Pest Information System which will coordinate the reporting and analysis of international animal and plant health information. Numerous Safeguarding Review recommendations call improved gathering and use of international animal health information (#s 31, 87, 89, 90, 91).
- Requirements for recognizing the animal health status of foreign regions – On August 20<sup>th</sup>, APHIS issued a final rule amending the regulations that set out procedures for recognizing the animal health status of regions in foreign countries. The amended regulations require that regions that have been granted status provide information or allow APHIS to access information to confirm the regions' animal health status upon request. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 47 and 53 discuss expanding risk assessment procedures.
- Specific import requirements for select dairy products from regions with FMD – In February, VS issued a proposed rule which would establish specific processing

requirements for certain cheeses, butter, and butteroil imported from regions in which foot-and-mouth disease exists; these products are currently exempt from requirements. VS' proposed processing requirements are consistent with Office International des Epizooties (OIE) standards. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 47 and 53 discuss expanding risk assessment procedures.

- Select agent rule implementation efforts – Procedures, processes, and standards have been developed for implementing the regulations associated with the Agricultural Bioterrorism Protection Act. A Laboratory Biosafety Inspection Course was held in July to train VS and CDC personnel who inspect Biosafety Level II and III facilities that handle select agents. While not specifically addressed in the Safeguarding Review recommendations, the procedures set out in the rule should allow greater tracking of biological agents and toxins.
- Standards for privately owned quarantine facilities proposed – VS issued a proposed rule in August which would establish standards for privately owned quarantine facilities. Current regulations for the importation of ruminants authorize the establishment of privately operated quarantine facilities subject to APHIS approval and oversight but do not provide specific standards for the approval, operation, and oversight of such facilities, with the exception of privately operated quarantine facilities for sheep and goats. The requirements contained in the proposed rule are designed to ensure that the health of the U.S. livestock population is not jeopardized by the release of unhealthy animals or communicable disease agents from quarantine facilities. There is currently increased interest among livestock importers in importing cattle through private quarantine facilities; no such facilities currently exist. The proposed requirements are in keeping with Safeguarding Review recommendation #43 which calls for ensuring that animals imported into the US fully meet import requirements.
- Proposed rule on veterinary biologics – In April, VS issued a proposed rule which would amend current regulations to specify actions that would have to be taken by veterinary biologics licensees and permittees upon their receipt of notice from APHIS to stop the preparation, distribution, sale, barter, exchange, shipment, or importation of any worthless, contaminated, dangerous, harmful, or unsatisfactory veterinary biological product. The proposal would specify that licensees and permittees would be required to notify wholesalers, dealers, jobbers, or other persons known to have veterinary biological products in their possession to stop the preparation, distribution, sale, barter, exchange, shipment, or importation of any worthless, contaminated, dangerous, harmful, or unsatisfactory veterinary biological product and to submit a complete accounting of the inventory of affected serials or subserials. These changes would prevent the risk that any worthless, contaminated, dangerous, harmful, or unsatisfactory veterinary biological product would cause harm to animals, public health, or the environment. The proposed requirements are in keeping with Safeguarding Review recommendation #43 which calls for ensuring that products imported into the US fully meet import requirements.

- OIE handbook on risk analysis – VS participated in an OIE effort to finalize volumes 1 and 2 of the OIE Handbook on Risk Analysis. The handbooks address both qualitative and quantitative import risk analysis in a manner that is consistent with the OIE Code. Upon approval by the OIE Code Commission, the handbooks will be available for distribution. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 47 and 53 discuss expanding risk assessment procedures. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 10 and 11 call for expanding APHIS' participation in international animal health discussions and activities.

## Laboratory System

- RRT - PCR tests validated for END and AI – Samples obtained from the exotic Newcastle disease and low pathogenic avian influenza outbreaks were utilized to validate the real-time reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RRT-PCR) assay for END and AI. The NVSL has held several training sessions for state laboratory personnel on these new assays. The RRT-PCR assays for END and AI are the first of a set of RTR-PCR assays being developed for foreign animal diseases. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations addressed the need for applied research to support response activities (#137 and 138).
- Progress on Ames modernization – Over half of the estimated required funds for the modernization project have been obtained through appropriations, supplemental bills, and transferred funds. Construction is forty percent complete on the Phase I Consolidated Laboratory Facility. This facility will house the Diagnostic Bacteriology and Pathobiology Laboratories. Groundbreaking on the High Containment Large Animal Housing Facility is expected in October 2003 with an expected completion date of January 2005. As part of the planning for new Ames facilities, NVSL, CVB, ARS, and facility design personnel conducted a benchmarking trip to view high containment large animal facilities at laboratories in the United Kingdom. Safeguarding Review recommendation #94 supports implementation of the APHIS-ARS Master Plan.
- Progress on NAHLN – The National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) initiative continues to move forward. The first face-to-face meeting of the NAHLN Steering Committee was hosted by NVSL in Ames in June. Two policy documents have been developed by the NAHLN Steering Committee: 1) Laboratory Qualification Checklist and 2) Policy Regarding Evaluation of Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories for Membership in the NAHLN. All 12 NAHLN laboratories have received training on foot-and-mouth disease; of the 12 NAHLN laboratories offered training on exotic Newcastle disease and avian influenza, 11 received training or were already proficient in the test. END surveillance testing will be done by the NAHLN laboratories through fee for service. Many of the 12 pilot laboratories have spent funds on improving biosecurity. Assurance of BSL-3 space for handling the eight targeted agents was part of all NAHLN work plans. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations

point toward the establishment of a national animal health laboratory system (#s 17, 74, and 121).

- Biosecurity at the USDA facilities – VS entered the third phase of projects aimed at planning and implementing a framework for maintaining security at USDA high-containment laboratories. VS, ARS, FSIS, and Office of Procurement and Property Management met with representatives from Sandia National Laboratories with the goal of developing USDA Biosecurity Reference Standards. Safeguarding Review recommendation #18 addressed the need to assure that APHIS laboratories are able to carry out their critical safeguarding roles.

#### Veterinary Accreditation

- Veterinary accreditation program standards – Significant changes are required in 9 CFR Parts 160, 161, and 162 to address changes in the veterinary accreditation program. Drafts of these new regulations are being evaluated in VS and will soon go the next review level within APHIS. It is anticipated that a proposed rule implementing these changes will be published in 2004. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 69, 101, 145, 146, and 147 call for VS to revise the accreditation program.
- Veterinary accreditation training – In March, a powerpoint module covering the Core Orientation was distributed to Area Offices. This presentation can be used by Area Offices in their training program for veterinarians seeking accreditation. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 69, 101, 145, 146, and 147 call for VS to revise the accreditation program.
- Veterinary Accreditation System (VAS) database – The VAS has recently been put on-line and made available to Area Offices through the Internet. VAS users will receive training on the system and passwords allowing them to access the system. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 69, 101, 145, 146, and 147 call for VS to revise the accreditation program.

#### Information Technology

- Technology coordinating office created – In early 2003, APHIS established an office to coordinate the Agency's efforts in identifying, adopting, and utilizing technology. Technologies which have applicability to more than one APHIS unit are the focus of this office; information technologies per se are not within the purview of this office. The coordinating office works to: expand the sharing of information about technologies of potential benefit to APHIS work, coordinate the assessment of technologies with potential APHIS application, and facilitate the use of appropriate, cost-effective technologies across the Agency. Safeguarding Review recommendation #77 directs APHIS to support the use of new technologies.



- Online reservation system launched – The new On-Line Animal Reservation System (OARS) was made available to users around the globe in September. The system allows brokers to reserve space at the Miami Animal Import Center, pay charges electronically, and cancel stall spaces. OARS is web-based. Safeguarding Review recommendation #77 directs APHIS to support the use of new technologies.
- Development of information systems for identifying shipments and tracking movement of animals and animal products – VS initiated a needs assessment examining how best to integrate the key systems being developed to support animal and animal product tracking activities within VS. In August, Colorado became the first of a planned five states this year to implement the Interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (ICVI). The electronic certificates will allow State Veterinarians and Area Veterinarians in Charge immediate notification of livestock that are scheduled to be moved into their State. The data received will be automatically stored in a database for reference in the event that potentially diseased livestock need to be traced. ICVI will provide an electronic transfer of interstate animal movement data and eventually replace the paper-based system. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations call for using improved technology to achieve VS objectives including expanding APHIS-VS ability to trace and control potentially infected animals (#s 3, 16, and 108).
- GIS staff added to regions – A GIS coordinator has been added to the staff of the VS Eastern Regional Office. Safeguarding Review recommendation #129 called for expanded use of GIS.
- Integration of VS data systems with state and industry data systems- Progress has been made in developing electronic linkages between VS data systems and a State-based animal disease surveillance information system – FAIR (used to record tuberculosis surveillance data in Michigan). In addition, several states are using/considering using the EMRS as a base module for disease reporting within their states. Also, a Memorandum of Understanding is in development with Canada for their use of the EMRS system for disease investigations within their country. Updates have also been made to the Generic Disease Database incorporating all of the priority reports identified by VS user groups. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations address the need for compatibility in systems (#s 82, 84, 86, and 129).
- Integration of laboratory data for the NAHLN – VS, working in conjunction with AAVLD, has signed a contract with Booz Allen and Hamilton to develop an information system that will allow electronic transfer and aggregation of laboratory results for specified disease agents. Booz Allen and Hamilton assisted in the development of the eLexnet used for a similar purpose by public health laboratories. The NAHLN will also provide a framework for integrating data and messaging standards within participating laboratories. Safeguarding Review

recommendations #s 3 and 84 address utilizing technological advancements to meet surveillance needs and improving connectivity.

#### Organizational Dynamics/Communication

- National threat communication plan – VS obtained input at a February meeting which it is using to develop a strategy to communicate information regarding agricultural-specific threats or emergencies. State Veterinarians, Area Veterinarians in Charge, and representatives from producer groups, the U.S. Animal Health Association, and the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians participated in this meeting/conference call. Safeguarding Review recommendation #143 calls for strengthening communication on occurrences of emergency animal disease or condition.
- Improved communications – APHIS maintained frequent communications with State and industry counterparts during the END and BSE situations. APHIS also hosted visits from international trading partners interested in the outbreaks. Safeguarding Review recommendations #s 29, 85, and 143 address improved communications regarding animal health issues.
- VS Highlights report – In early 2003, VS made available on its website a report highlighting Agency accomplishments. VS plans to make this an annual report. Safeguarding Review recommendations #88 and 99 direct VS to develop and disseminate an annual report.
- VS Strategic Plan - VS issued a new five year strategic plan in February which included a new goal addressing organizational effectiveness. Specific objectives under this goal include: addressing human resource issues, improving communications, developing information technology, and improving efficiency. VS budget requests are geared toward strategic goals. Several Safeguarding Review recommendations addressed internal improvements needed in VS to improve safeguarding (#s 65, 140, and 141).
- Digitized foreign animal disease training available – VS Emergency Programs has created digitized foreign animal disease training information. This information has been used at a number of training sessions this year. Safeguarding Review recommendation #113 calls for extending foreign animal disease training opportunities to state, university, industry, and private practitioners.

#### **II. Implementation activities:**

Safeguarding Issue Groups provided input during the FY 2004 and FY 2005 budget development process. Issue Group have begun drafting action plans to address their assigned recommendations.

Updates on safeguarding activities were presented at the VS Managers Meeting held in August 2003.

In late August, members of the Veterinary Accreditation Issue Group participated in a review of workflow automation proposals. The proposed automation will simplify the veterinary accreditation application process and reduce the paperwork and time required to complete the certification process for exported animals.

The Surveillance Issue Group is assisting in the launching of the National Surveillance Unit.

The Laboratory Systems, Coordinated Response, Information Technology, and Organizational Dynamics Issue Groups are planning conference calls in October/November.

---

*Comments and questions regarding this report can be directed to Carol Tuszynski at Area Code (970) 494-7320.*

